

VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE FOR CHILDREN  
WITH DEFECTIVE VISION

Heled J. Coffin

HV 1652C

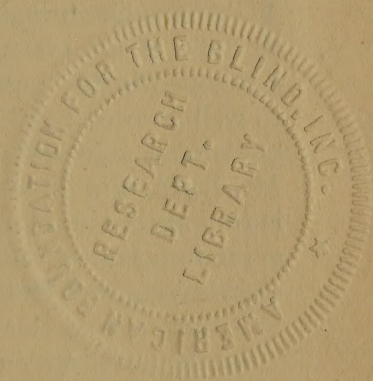




**M.C. MIGEL LIBRARY  
AMERICAN PRINTING  
HOUSE FOR THE BLIND**



# Vocational Guidance for Children with Defective Vision



HELEN J. COFFIN  
Supervisor of Braille  
and Sight-Saving Classes  
Cleveland, Ohio

The National Society for the  
Prevention of Blindness, Inc.  
50 West 50th Street, New York, N. Y.

# Vocational Guidance for Children with Defective Vision \*

Helen J. Coffin

THE author urges that vocational decisions be postponed as long as possible for children with defective vision; but sight-saving class boys and girls need "educational guidance" to avoid needless courses which may cause a waste of eye energy

## Introduction

IT seems like bringing coals to Newcastle to come to Chicago to talk about vocational guidance, which has been so highly developed in the public school system here, and for which it is so well known; but Cleveland has been somewhat of a pioneer in vocational guidance as applied in the special field of sight saving. Mr. Irwin, now director of the American Foundation for the Blind, is responsible in a large measure for this, since he considered it of great importance and engaged a special vocational counselor for sight-saving and Braille classes in 1917, only four years after the first sight-saving class was organized in Cleveland.

In the past sixteen years we have tried to keep abreast of the guidance movement as it has developed; continuously to make adaptations of the general scheme of guidance to the sight-saving class pupils' needs (and adaptations are always necessary with a group which deviates from normal pupils in so important a respect as eyesight); and to make the adjustments in our set-up which have been demanded by current conditions and the uncertainty of the future in this rapidly changing world of ours.

Perhaps I shall express some opinions with which you will not agree, and I may not myself in another year if situations change

\* Presented at a meeting of Illinois Sight-Saving Class Teachers, Chicago, Illinois, December 11, 1933, and reprinted from *The Sight-Saving Review*, Vol. IV, No. 1, March, 1934.



and facts alter the case; but what I have to offer comes from an initial training in the general field of vocational guidance and much subsequent experience in educational and vocational guidance in the sight-saving field.

Since the guidance movement first started there have been many improvements over the arbitrary manner in which we went about to determine a person's future career, and to say with more or less finality, "Now you must train for and do this or that." There is more attention paid to educational and social guidance, and less determining of the specific vocation for a child before the time of actual placement. We are approaching the whole problem from the learner's point of view. We are developing in boys and girls some responsibility for the wise selection of their life careers by giving them opportunities to know what occupations there are in the world; to know how workers should be fitted by native or acquired abilities to do certain types of work; and to estimate how their own abilities may match the requirements for the kind of work they desire to do. In the junior high schools so-called vocational courses are now considered really as try-out courses, or pre-vocational courses. Specific trade and technical training are generally included only in the curricula of special schools, or senior high schools. We find that specific vocational training is no more profitable for lower grade sight-saving class pupils than it has been found profitable for sighted pupils. I will touch upon vocational training briefly a little later.

Guidance, however, is being emphasized one way or another by all who are concerned in the educational programs of the youth of today; but vocational guidance and placement are an exceedingly baffling problem and especially difficult for the sight-saving workers in times like the present.

I should like to discuss seven or eight points with you, some very briefly, others more fully, as time will permit.

### **What is Guidance?**

You have asked me to speak on vocational guidance, but I cannot divorce vocational guidance from educational guidance. The term "vocational" connotes too narrow a meaning and allows preparation for only a specific job.



I would define guidance as the assistance which is given a pupil to help him to assimilate his school learning and his experience to the end that he may develop an understanding of his capacities; that he may become adjusted to his social and vocational environment; and that he may be better able continuously to make wise decisions in his preparation for and choice of a life career.

The adaptation of a guidance program for sight-saving class boys and girls will be determined by the special problem which is presented by the kinds of boys and girls in sight-saving classes. In the first place, children are placed in the classes because of their individual eye conditions, and many different conditions are represented in one class enrollment. In addition, sight-saving class pupils vary in many other individual traits and aptitudes. The sight-saving class teacher meets a real challenge to her skill and technique in that she has to deal with dull, emotionally unstable, and otherwise physically handicapped children, as well as bright, perfectly balanced, and otherwise physically well children—all in her class because they have certain visual defects.

Sight-saving classes present a cross section of the school enrollment, but the pupils in them cannot be classed for guidance, or any other school work, just because they may have a similar eye defect. The child who is to leave school at 15 or 16 presents one kind of problem in guidance. The high I. Q. child presents another kind of problem. This brings us to another point—the need of guidance for sight-saving class pupils.

All of these pupils need guidance just as much, but no more than any other school pupil. The emphasis is upon the kind of guidance. The average lay person seems to think that each and every sight-saving class boy or girl can be immediately pigeon-holed as far as his life career is concerned by receiving vocational guidance. This can no more be done with these boys and girls than with any others.

My early experience showed me that vocational guidance could not be separated from educational and social guidance and that vocational decisions should be postponed as long as possible. Teachers and counselors cannot determine for a child in the grades, and he cannot decide for himself, at that age, that some particular job will become his life work, especially as job opportunities are



today. We may predict that, according to statistics, a certain number of boys and girls will be found as men and women in certain types of work, but this is generalizing and does not mean that John and Joan will be placed in that work.

### **Educational Guidance First Consideration**

Our first step, therefore, is to emphasize educational guidance. I consider this to be the kind of guidance which sight-saving class boys and girls do need more than sighted pupils, since irreparable damage may be done by the offhand selection of school courses, the learning of which may constitute a great waste of eye energy.

May there not also be a similar waste if the child who leaves school at the minimum age makes the wrong choice of a job? Any child who leaves school at the minimum age is too immature and has too little strength to start out on skilled work. The sight-saving class boy or girl of slow mentality will make just as much of the type of work offered to juveniles as other pupils, given a like opportunity, with special consideration for the eye work required. For the child who can go on in school, actual placement of the pupil whom the teacher may guide is a long way off, and it is through educational guidance that the child learns to be better able continuously to make his own wise decisions concerning his work when the time arrives to leave school, or university.

By whom should guidance be given to sight-saving class pupils? With so many angles and so many types of guidance I want to consider for a moment the question of how and by whom guidance should be offered to the sight-saving class pupil. Many high schools and junior high schools now offer courses in guidance and in vocational information. Some schools offer courses called Personal Regimen. While these latter may not be classed as guidance courses, yet they offer a valuable addition to vocational guidance in that they deal with appearance, office manner, personality, development, etc. Every available course open to the regular class pupil in the school in which a sight-saving class is located may well be considered for the sight-saving class boys and girls. In the *Sight-Saving Class Exchange*, No. 38, November, 1931, Miss Anne Goehring has described the vocational guidance program for a Dayton junior high school, and its application to the sight-saving



class. Since the preparation and the reading for regular class work are presumably done with the sight-saving class teacher, she will have an opportunity to take up the analysis of the occupations studied from the point of view of eyesight requirements.

### **Vocational Counselor Desirable**

In addition to guidance courses, it is desirable that a special vocational counselor be assigned for the sight-saving class pupils. It is only through many contacts with boys and girls and men and women with defective eyesight that the counselor can become thoroughly prepared. In addition to training and experience in this and the general field, the special counselor should have an intimate knowledge of all eye conditions and sight conservation methods.

I realize that at the present time most schools find it impossible to employ a special vocational counselor, and this duty is another of the many which must devolve upon the sight-saving class teacher. Even if she cannot be entirely familiar with the program of guidance and the technique of the trained vocational counselor, she does know the individual pupils and their eye conditions, and can work in close co-operation with the ophthalmologists. With all due respect to the ophthalmologists, they do not always know enough about the pupils' aptitudes, the school curriculum, or occupations, in general, to give the very best educational and vocational advice; but the results of combining the knowledge of doctor and teacher in the advice to the pupil are fairly good, especially in educational guidance.

When a pupil nears the end of his school career, whether it is at the minimum age to leave school or after high school graduation, and the questions of vocational guidance and placement become imminent, here again only those persons familiar with the physiology and hygiene of the eye, and with the pupil's aptitudes and mental rating, should venture to assist the pupil in his choice of a specific line of work. I am emphasizing this for it seems to me that without guidance from the point of view of the ophthalmologist—the expert on the medical side—and the sight-saving class teacher and counselor—the expert on the school and vocational side—the child who has been carefully protected throughout his school career



may be misguided at a most critical time and subsequently waste time and energy needlessly.

### Hints for Vocational Guidance

Sight-saving class teachers, facing the needs of their pupils for guidance, both educational and vocational, may be interested in some definite suggestions which have been found helpful to the sight-saving class teacher who is both educational and vocational counselor. Some of these points were talked over at one of our teachers' meetings in Ohio last spring. It is suggested that the following, if they could be put into the hands of teachers, would be valuable to them:

- Lists of all occupations of former sight-saving class pupils, obtained by an annual follow-up survey.

- An annotated bibliography on guidance and occupations.

- A list of all opportunities for guidance, including courses in the junior and senior high schools, in your system.

- The teacher should

  - Co-operate with established bureaus of guidance, especially in order to keep in touch with the general field, local industrial and business conditions, and possible fields of employment.

  - Co-operate with oculists.

- In addition, the teacher should have available

  - The pupils' P.L.R.'s, or I.Q.'s.

  - Records of home conditions.

- She should also be acquainted with her pupils' ambitions, and their social and personal limitations.

The teacher should try to keep her rating of her pupils objective rather than subjective. This is important, because a teacher may have a pupil over an unusually long period of years, as is customary in cities having but one or two classes, and she may mistake improvement for ability.

Now from the learner's point of view—how may your sight-saving class pupils learn guidance in a manner applicable to their specific needs? I think this can be done best where regular courses may be interpreted, with the help of the sight-saving class teacher, through a special eye hygiene course. This correlates well with assignments from regular class guidance courses. A course in eye hygiene, including sight conservation, may also constitute one of



the best means of teaching guidance to sight-saving class boys and girls. Through it they may learn what they may do safely at home; what games they may play, both outdoors and indoors; what kinds of jobs they may do in their after-school and summer hours. This gives rise to a discussion of future vocations.

We have been trying to develop a responsibility for the school and community program of sight conservation in our junior high school pupils. In this way the problem becomes impersonal at the same time that it is developing personal responsibility for sight conservation.

### **Opportunity to Learn from Others' Experiences**

As it nears the time for a pupil to leave the sight-saving class, he should know some of the occupations in which former sight-saving class pupils with similar eye defects and abilities—and this is important—have succeeded. At all times due respect must be paid to the pupil's desires and ambitions. If these are contrary to his own best interests, much skill and tact are required to guide him toward other interests. Right here are the times when compromises may sometimes have to be made, and the teacher and counselor must not be too rigid or inflexible.

If a teacher has available both general lists of occupations and also lists of the specific occupations actually engaged in by former sight-saving class boys and girls, she may present these as positive suggestions in order to develop new interests in the boy, or girl, and to ween him from a fixed desire to take up something which is known to be an unsatisfactory career for one with his sight. I have mentioned previously that such lists would be of definite help to the sight-saving class teacher. These may also be referred to by pupils if some of the lists are put into large typewritten copy.

If you desire to be very specific and advise a boy or girl what work to apply for tomorrow, you will have to offer suggestions from those fields of work in the community which are today employing persons of a given sex, age, and ability. If you are merely suggesting a vocation for some subsequent date, consider very carefully the ability of the pupil and all the factors bearing upon his aptitudes and eye restrictions, and consider the permanency of the work along the lines of his ambition.



Everything in industry is so uncertain today that no one can make predictions concerning specific occupations for any of the youth now in school. When fine boys and girls, college men and women, trained professional men and women, as well as common laborers without education, have walked the streets for months without work, how can we plan with any assurance for the specific future jobs for any child now in school?

### **Guidance as a Part of Training for Life**

However, these children must be prepared when opportunity does present itself. Therefore, I suggest that guidance for sight-saving class boys and girls direct them toward a rather general preparation for life. They should have as much school training as they are capable of, and the longer they can put off too narrow specialization the better.

Their training should emphasize the need for alertness, versatility, conservation of health, co-operation with fellow workers, and the ability to make the best of every situation and to seize new opportunities as they arise. If there is any special training, let it be training for occupations which are of a more or less permanent nature, such as work connected with the preparation and serving of foods; some business training leading to indoor or outdoor sales work. If a student is to go to college, majoring in sociology with a view to undertaking social work may be possible for some.

General lists of occupations and job classifications such as may be found in *Occupations—The Vocational Guidance Magazine*, offer good suggestions. For instance, a teacher may rarely have a student who would show a desire or inclination for religious work, but there are certainly some kinds of religious social work into which a person with limited vision might go. For a good many years we have tried to compile the results of questionnaires sent out to our former pupils. Such lists compiled in your local community should be very specifically helpful, both to teacher and to pupil.

My final point concerns the development of the whole child since, after all, we must provide for the development of personality as well as the conservation of sight. What, then, are the rights of the sight-saving class pupils in the choice of elective studies and,



finally, in the selection of a career, whether they start out for a job, a position, a profession, or to be just a person about the house?

We have some oculists who are much interested in their own field of work and in the sight-saving classes; but they are also unusually interested in the development of the boy and girl. I quote from one when I say, "We want the child eye-careful, not eye-conscious."

### **Guidance for Myopes in Sight-Saving Classes**

I do not know much about your sight-saving class population in Illinois. In our sight-saving classes in Cleveland we average annually about fifty per cent myopes. These pupils, on the whole, have a better average mentality than do the low vision pupils. At the present time we have four in major work classes. With reasonable care now, the oculists predict that these pupils may go through high school and probably college, if by college age there has been no serious increase in myopia. After this many of the restrictions now imposed in the use of the eyes will be removed and the young men and women may go on in a perfectly normal manner.

Except for knowledge of the physiology and hygiene of the eye, and some knowledge of lighting and the proper use of light, and the practice of methods of doing eye work which, through daily application in sight-saving classes, we expect will become matters of habit, these myopic pupils should be very normal members of any community. They should, therefore, have every opportunity to take courses in school suited to their particular aptitudes and their vocational ambitions. If the latter present a serious conflict between what is eye-safe and what is desired above all else, do we have a right to say "thou shalt not"? After all, we cannot make neurotics out of children to save their sight. We must be very cautious in the use of negatives lest a conflict be built up, and the child develop a sense of inferiority which as an adult he will not be able to overcome.

Oculists pretty much agree that danger of seriously impairing vision in cases of myopia comes before twenty-one. After that age the use of the eyes in a reasonable and sensible way may be quite safe. What myopic pupils can do, therefore, will be deter-



mined by factors other than those of eyesight. They may do many things which other persons of like mentality and ability do.

It is to be hoped that attendance in a sight-saving class, through school years, will have given them knowledge of how to do their work. Of course we cannot know whether or not many famous people who have had myopia would have been better off for sight-saving class methods. Theodore Roosevelt did not become blind, although he was known to be myopic. Others could be cited whose work has made the world better. I have no doubt that success may be an ultimate goal more to be chosen by some than sight. Certainly those persons who are making a great contribution have a right to make their own choice.

### **Guidance for Other Sight-Saving Class Pupils**

I have been talking about fifty per cent of our enrollment. The other fifty per cent of the pupils in the sight-saving classes, who have low vision arising from a variety of causes, present an entirely different problem. Their choice of work is limited largely because of lack of visual acuity, not by the harm which may come from the use of their eyes. They are in more need of vocational training for some specific occupation than are myopes. There are some vocational training courses in the high schools which these pupils may take, and specialized training is desirable for many of them. In some selected cases of slow mentality this is especially needed.

A person with low vision is always at a disadvantage in working with his hands, and the boy or girl who must seek manual employment generally needs more training in order to acquire sufficient manual skill to compete with normally sighted men and women. From this group we are likely to find more recruits to the ranks of the dependent. In such cases it is perhaps justifiable for the counselor or the teacher to be more arbitrary in the courses of studies allowed, and more emphatic in insisting that a pupil not spend time and energy in preparing to be, let us say, a typist, since we know what experience has not yet taught the pupil, that practically every typing position requires transcribing from stenographic notes, or small type. A low vision pupil might see this, but the element of time required to see this, and the nervous fatigue attendant upon the effort, all make this an impossible field

of work in which to earn a living. On the other hand, there may be many children, even in this group, for whom a general course will prove the best means of developing their abilities.

And so, in conclusion, I want to stress the importance of considering each sight-saving class pupil individually. There are many possibilities of work for these boys and girls as well as some impossibilities. The answer to the question, "What can sight-saving class boys and girls do?" is, "A great variety of things depending upon their abilities, industry and personality." They need help and guidance toward making a wise choice and often, but not always, help in securing the actual placement.



## PAMPHLET BINDERS

This is No. 1525

also carried in stock in the following sizes

	HIGH		WIDE	THICKNESS		HIGH		WIDE	THICKNESS
1523	9 inches		7 inches	$\frac{1}{2}$ inch	1529	12 inches	10 inches	$\frac{1}{2}$ inch	
1524	10 "		7 "	"	1530	12 "	$9\frac{3}{8}$ "	"	"
1525	9 "		6 "	"	1932	13 "	10 "	"	"
1526	$9\frac{1}{4}$ "		$7\frac{1}{4}$ "	"	1933	14 "	11 "	"	"
1527	$10\frac{1}{2}$ "		$7\frac{3}{8}$ "	"	1934	16 "	12 "	"	"
1528	11 "		8 "	"					

Other sizes made to order.

MANUFACTURED BY

**LIBRARY BUREAU**

Division of REMINGTON RAND INC.

Library Supplies of all Kinds



